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C O N F I D E N T I A L LJUBLJANA 001136

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SI](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: LIBERAL DEMOCRATS HAVE HEADS IN THE SAND

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas B. Robertson for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) After leading Slovene governments for 12 years, the Liberal Democracy Party (LDS) became over-confident, assuming, perhaps, that inertia would sweep it back into office last October 3. Accusations of arrogance have been heaped upon the party, even from within, and it is widely agreed that a lack of vision and leadership contributed significantly to LDS' poor showing in the elections.

BACKGROUND

[¶2.](#) (U) In 1992, after the dissolution of DEMOS, a democratic coalition that defeated the Communists in Slovenia's first free elections in 1990, LDS emerged as Slovenia's strongest political party. That same year, LDS received the relative majority in national elections and formed its first coalition government. LDS won enough votes to form governments in 1996 and 2000. In May of 2000, LDS lost control of government in a vote of no-confidence, but returned to power six months later in special elections when it received an unprecedented 36% of the vote.

[¶3.](#) (U) During the 10 years from 1992-2002, Janez Drnovsek led the LDS and the GOS as prime minister. Fatigued by years of intra-coalition negotiations and a serious bout with kidney cancer, Drnovsek decided to run for President (a much less demanding position) in 2002. He won Presidential elections in November 2002 and chose Anton Rop as his successor both as president of the party and as prime minister.

A STEP TO THE LEFT

[¶4.](#) (C) With Rop in the lead, a pronounced shift to the left occurred. Rop seemed to shrug off the mantle Drnovsek had passed to him and determined to chart an independent (of the old-line LDS) course for the Government. Relying primarily on his own close circle of advisors, Rop created what would become an unbridgeable gap between himself and the traditional LDS base of voters and political supporters.

[¶5.](#) (C) Rop and his party did not heed the signs when the LDS and the left essentially lost the elections for European Parliament in June 2004. The LDS treated this result as a one-off event rather than a red flag signaling a loss of voter support. Even notoriously pro-LDS polls were indicating an LDS drop in popularity. Yet, Rop and the LDS made little extra effort to rally support for the October 2004 elections. Slovene voters took a jump to the right and the LDS seemed as surprised to lose as Jansa and his coalition did to win.

COMMENT

[¶6.](#) (C) The loss of both sets of elections in 2004 did little to foster real introspection among the LDS leadership. Instead of analyzing "why" it lost, the party looked to cast blame. Some called publicly for Rop's resignation as party president, others blamed the media - generally considered a strong supporter of LDS - thus alienating another long-time constituency. In an early December party congress, Anton Rop was re-elected as president of the LDS, an interesting move considering Rop's leadership is widely viewed as a primary cause of LDS' recent losses. If the LDS hopes to do well in local elections in 2006 or even to regain power in national elections in 2008, it will have to shed its image of arrogance and develop a program that appeals to voters clearly fed up with how the old-boys club, under Anton Rop, had been running the country.

ROBERTSON

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